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Red Berries, White Clouds, Blue Sky



Synopsis

It's 1942: Tomi Itano, 12, is a second-generation Japanese American who lives in California with her family on their strawberry farm. Although her parents came from Japan and her grandparents still live there, Tomi considers herself an American. She doesn't speak Japanese and has never been to Japan. But after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, things change. No Japs Allowed signs hang in store windows and Tomi's family is ostracized. Things get much worse. Suspected as a spy, Tomi's father is taken away. The rest of the Itano family is sent to an internment camp in Colorado. Many other Japanese American families face a similar fate. Tomi becomes bitter, wondering how her country could treat her and her family like the enemy. What does she need to do to prove she is an honorable American? Sandra Dallas shines a light on a dark period of American history in this story of a young Japanese American girl caught up in the prejudices and World War II.

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Customer Reviews

Tomi Itano was an American, or so she thought. "Go on, kids. Scram. Can't you read the sign?" Mr. Akron had always been nice to them until now. Tomi and her brother Hiro were just

going to get some candy, but something was terribly wrong and they weren't going to be getting any. Osamu, Sam, her father, and her mother Sumiko had come from Japan and were Issei, first generation Americans. It didn't make a lot of sense that they were all of a sudden not American. One thing the Itanos knew how to do was raise the stars and stripes before they began working on their strawberry farm in the morning. The strange men started asking Tomi about Pop. "Doe your father use the radio late at night?" "Didn't everyone? Her father wasn't much welcome in America any more either. The FBI was sending Pop to New Mexico. Mom, Tomi, and her brothers Hiro and Roy would be staying behind in California, or so they thought. "Shikata ga nai," Mom exclaimed. It couldn't be helped and neither could the Itano family. Heck, twelve-year-old Tomi couldn't even speak Japanese, but when Mrs. Malkin told her she was out of the Girl Scouts she understood that. The furniture was sold for pennies on the dollar, but no way was Mom going to sell her washing machine for twenty-five cents. Breaking it was better than selling it for two bits and so she did just that. Executive Order 9066 was a piece of paper that turned Tomi Itano into an evacuee. First stop was Santa Anita where there was a "high barbed-wire fence" and men with guns. The Itanos crowded into a horse stall in a "horse-stall hotel." Mom would make it into a home, but soon they would be heading to Tallgrass, Colorado. "Go on back to where you came from!" "Yeah, but where did Tomi belong if it wasn't in America?"

The year is 1942 and for 12-year-old Tomi Itano, a second-generation Japanese-American, life is about to change. Tomi loves everything about her home: the strawberries her father grows on their farm, her Girl Scout troop, her Japanese doll, which her grandparents sent her, and the American flag, which her father proudly salutes every day. But amidst the paranoia of World War II, when Japanese newspapers and letters from home, are "proof" of being an enemy spy, the Itano's become victims of fear, prejudice, and false accusations. Tomi's father is arrested and taken to prison. After President Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066 ordering thousands of Japanese to be relocated, Mrs. Itano and her three children are taken to a series of interment camps. They finally are taken to Tall Grass, Colorado (a fictionalized camp based on Hamache) where they are forced to make a 16 x 20 square foot room their apartment. Despite always worrying how Mr. Itano will find them, the family adjusts to camp life. Although they don't want to be there, the children gain friends and Mrs. Itano blossoms in her new role as a quilting teacher. Interactions with the local townspeople add more spice to the story. When Dennis, a boy Tomi meets, confronts her on being "un-American" because of how she looks, she retaliates in anger. Discovering he is the son of a German immigrant, she questions if everyone should be rounded up and shipped to

a camp just because they all don't look alike. His changed attitude towards the Japanese would be a great teaching point for teachers using this book in an upper elementary/middle school classroom. When Mr. Itano is finally reunited with the family, he is a different man. Being unfairly imprisoned has left him bitter.

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